

## Message Text

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ACTION EUR-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 PM-07 H-03 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00

NSC-10 PA-03 RSC-01 PRS-01 SPC-03 SS-15 USIA-15

ACDA-19 IO-13 SAJ-01 MBFR-04 TRSE-00 DRC-01 /135 W

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R 170801Z SEP 73

FM AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8673

SECDEF WASHDC

DIA WASHDC

INFO AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY LUXEMBOURG

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE

AMEMBASSY LONDON

USMISSION NATO BRUSSELS

USNMR SHAPE

USDELMC

USCINCEUR

CINCUSAREUR

CINCUSAFE

CINCUSNAVEUR

C O N F I D E N T I A L BRUSSELS 5263

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MARR, BE

SUBJECT: BELGIAN DEFENSE REFORMS

REF: BRUSSELS 5168

1. BASED ON INFORMATION REPORTED REFTEL, SUBSEQUENT PRESS  
CONFERENCE BY MINISTER OF NATIONAL DEFENSE VANDEN BOEYNANTS  
(REPORTED SEPARATELY), AND INITIAL PROBES OF BELGIAN GOVERNMENT  
AND MILITARY, EMBASSY OFFERS THE FOLLOWING PRELIMINARY COMMENTS  
ON THE RECENTLY ANNOUNCED PLAN TO RESTRUCTURE THE RECRUITMENT  
SYSTEM FOR THE BELGIAN ARMED FORCES. WE WILL COMMENT FURTHER AS  
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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION BECOMES AVAILABLE.

2. ALTHOUGH NEW PLAN BEARS A RESEMBLANCE TO A POSITION PUBLICLY TAKEN BY SOCIALIST PARTY SEVERAL WEEKS AGO, GOVERNMENT PLANNING ON THE MEASURES ANNOUNCED WAS APPARENTLY KNOWN TO ONLY A VERY SMALL CIRCLE WITHIN VANDEN BOEYNANTS' CABINET PLUS THE CHIEF OF THE GENERAL STAFF (LT. GEN. CREKILLE) AND THE ARMY CHIEF OF STAFF (LT. GEN. ROMAN). WITH FEWER THAN TEN INDIVIDUALS INVOLVED, THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE PLAN NATURALLY CAUGHT MANY SENIOR PERSONALITIES OFF GUARD, INCLUDING LT. GEN. BRECX, WHO, AS COMMANDER OF THE INTERIOR FORCES, WILL BE SADDLED WITH THE GREAT MAJORITY OF THE SIX-MONTH CONSCRIPTS.

3. WHETHER BY COINCIDENCE OR DESIGN (WE SUSPECT THE LATTER), THE PLAN DOES GO A LONG WAY IN THE DIRECTION OF SOCIALIST THINKING, (SOCIALIST DEMANDS FOR A SIX-MONTH TERM OF SERVICE GO BACK TO THE TIME WHEN THE EYSKENS-COOLS GOVERNMENT WAS BEING FORMED, ALTHOUGH THE SOCIALISTS SETTLED FOR A GOVERNMENT PROGRAM CALLING FOR LESS DRASTIC REDUCTIONS IN SERVICE TIME.) A CVP (FLEMISH WING OF THE SOCIAL CHRISTIAN PARTY) CONGRESS SCHEDULED FOR NEXT MONTH WILL DEAL WITH DEFENSE MATTERS AMONG OTHER THINGS, AND VANDEN BOEYNANTS, ALTHOUGH HIMSELF A BRUSSELS-BASED SOCIAL CHRISTIAN, MAY HAVE WANTED TO GET THE PLAN APPROVED BY THE GOVERNMENT BEFORE THE CVP HAD AN OPPORTUNITY TO TABLE CONTRARY SUGGESTIONS. THIS COULD ALSO EXPLAIN THE SECRECY SURROUNDING THE FORMULATION OF THE PLAN.

4. IT IS DIFFICULT AT THIS TIME TO ASSESS WHAT THE IMPACT OF THE CHANGES WILL BE ON THE THREE SERVICES, ALTHOUGH IT CAN BE ASSUMED THAT THE ARMY WILL BE MOST SERIOUSLY AFFECTED. DAO HAS LEARNED THAT THE THREE SERVICE STAFFS HAVE NOW (I.E., AFTER FORMULATION AND ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE PLAN) BEEN ASKED TO ASSESS THE IMPACT OF THE PLAN ON THEIR RESPECTIVE SERVICES.

5. IN HIS PRESS CONFERENCE, VANDEN BOEYNANTS SAID THAT THE PLAN WOULD BE SUBMITTED TO PARLIAMENT DURING THE FOURTH QUARTER OF 1973, AND WE HAVE BEEN TOLD THAT HE HOPES THAT PARLIAMENT WILL HAVE APPROVED THE PLAN BY MID-DECEMBER. WE FIND VANDEN BOEYNANTS' EXPECTATIONS HIGHLY UNLIKELY OF REALIZATION BUT NOT INCONSISTENT WITH HIS OFT-DEMONSTRATED OPTIMISM AND SELF-CONFIDENCE.

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6. THE PACE THAT VANDEN BOEYNANTS HOPES TO ACHIEVE RAISES THE KEY QUESTION OF HOW MUCH TIME WILL BE DEVOTED TO THE NATO CONSULTATIONS THAT SO OFTEN HAVE BEEN PLEDGED BY VANDEN BOEYNANTS AND THE GOVERNMENT. WE WILL BE SEEKING MORE PRECISE INFORMATION ON BELGIAN INTENTIONS IN THIS RESPECT, BUT WOULD WELCOME ANYTHING NATO AND SHAPE ADDRESSEES CAN PROVIDE ON WHETHER BELGIANS HAVE BEGUN THE CONSULTATION PROCESS.

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